

SESSION 3: LET THE LAND PRODUCE VEGETATION

Genesis 1:9-13 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

9 And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 11 Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

Introductions and warm up task

- Introduce yourselves to your group.
- Talk about your favourite tree: where is it, what is it, why is it important to you?

Let us pray:

May the holy and life-giving God teach us to reverence all his works, to praise him in all we do, to live in his image and his glory. Amen (p296 Celtic Daily Prayer)

Bible discussion

In your group share out these passages: Luke 23:44-45, Romans 8:19-22, Psalm 148

Read the passage through and then answer the following questions:

- If you had to describe your passage in three words, what would they be?
- What does the passage tell you about who God is?
- What does the passage tell you about how the land responds to God?

Feedback your thoughts together or to the bigger group. In your feedback you are looking to draw out themes of togetherness. We are not on a separate journey towards restoration with Jesus. The land worships, mourns and grieves.

INPUT: Togetherness

Ruth Valerio shows us so profoundly in her book, the link and connection between God and what he made on Day 3 of creation: 'The Lord of all creation, the one through whom all things were made (including trees), died for us, nailed to his creation, so that we who were once far off might be brought near through his blood, spilled onto the land, and the whole creation set free. Little wonder then that the natural world responds so dramatically at the moment of his death as darkness descends over the land and the earth shakes.' (Matthew 27:45, 51)

We have inherited a way of thinking about God and reading the Bible as though land, trees and people are completely separate. But when we read carefully, we notice how often land responds to God, how often trees are core to the teaching and habits of God's people.

Romans talks about creation, the land, waiting for restoration. Paul also talks about the rocks crying out in worship. Isaiah and Jeremiah are Old Testament prophets who plead with the Israelites to follow God properly. In their pleading, they talk about how people and land are withering as a result of human behaviour and lack of human worship of God. (Isaiah 24:4 and Jeremiah 4:28)

We are missing something of the heart of God when we forget his love for the land. We miss out on opportunities to worship him with our everyday lives when we neglect care for creation. (*from SYTL Youth Resource*)

Discussion

“a major reason for the environmental crisis today is the way the western thinking has demystified nature and included it in the sphere of the secular”

Mika Vahakangas p56 *Saying Yes to Life*.

“matter matters to God” Prof David Wilkinson, p 56 *Saying Yes to life*

- Where do you see your Christian tradition reflecting a false dualism between natural and spiritual? How does a fresh realisation of land and trees in the bible affect your thinking?

Reflection

Think about land rights – looking at page 64-66 of *Saying Yes to Life*

- How aware are you of your connectedness to the land? What helps you appreciate that more deeply?
- How has colonialization impacted your country?

Watch the interview with Bernadette Kabonesa

- What does she say that makes you think and what is important to reflect on?

Action

Read “To plant a tree” on p77 of *Saying Yes to Life*

- What personal action will you take to look after the world’s land and trees.

A prayer for trees and earth

God of creation you have taught us to love life, that of all our desires must overcome the desire for life, a desire that must transcend valuing all living beings of creation. The trees and the earth groan because of our little conscience to take care of them and protect them, we have taken over and profited far from protecting them from death. We have seen the earth as a resource to exploit and not as a mother. We accept the challenge of taking care of ourselves to take care of our mother and house the earth, trees and life. We recognise that you have given us a greater understanding than other living beings to reflect your creative, community and loving character with everything that exists. Lord, we commit ourselves to live taking care of all nature, protecting our hearts from selfish desires and living not as owners, but as brothers and in community with all living beings and especially with the trees that are the source of life.

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